



# NUTRITION, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND OBESITY

## WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating, two primary causes of obesity, are responsible for at least 300,000 preventable deaths each year in the United States and increase the risk for many chronic diseases including cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.
- The majority of people in the United States have poor eating habits. For example, only 28% of women and 20% of men eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day.
- Over 60% of adults do not engage in levels of physical activity needed to provide health benefits.
- Obesity has reached epidemic proportions. In the past 20 years, the prevalence of obesity has increased by more than 60% among adults and tripled in children and adolescents. Fifteen percent of children and adolescents are overweight and more than half of these children have at least one cardiovascular disease risk factor, such as elevated cholesterol and hypertension.
- The cost of diseases associated with obesity has been estimated at \$117 billion per year.

## WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC has expanded the national nutrition and physical activity program for preventing obesity and other chronic diseases. This expansion included support for 12 states to plan statewide nutrition and physical activity programs and to conduct demonstration interventions, particularly through population-based strategies such as policy-level change, environmental change, and social marketing. States are currently developing plans to address state priority populations and establishing critical partnerships to achieve program goals. States then will establish and evaluate programs for the state's priority populations. CDC has also undertaken prevention research and health tracking that will provide national leadership in this area. CDC will continue applied research efforts to better define the contributions of food patterns to obesity, define metabolic fitness and examine its association with obesity, evaluate public health interventions in the prevention and reduction of obesity, and examine the effects of environmental and behavioral factors on obesity.

*Example of program in action:* The St. Louis University Prevention Research Center used a CDC grant to develop and evaluate a physical activity program in rural communities in the Bootheel and Ozark areas of Missouri, areas with the highest rates of heart disease in the country. The evaluation found that 42% of community residents used walking trails established through the program and that almost 60% of trail users reported increasing their physical activity since the trails were built. The evaluation also indicates that segments of the population at highest risk for physical inactivity--women and persons with lower educational levels--may be especially responsive to walking trails. Women and persons with a high school education or less were more likely to have increased walking due to trail use.

## WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

In support of Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson's *Steps to a HealthierUS* prevention initiative, CDC plans to increase assistance to the existing 12 state programs. CDC will continue research efforts and collaborate with other federal and national partners to develop a comprehensive plan to promote physical activity and good nutrition, address the obesity epidemic using cost-effective interventions, and develop communication strategies.

For information on this and other CDC programs, visit [www.cdc.gov/programs](http://www.cdc.gov/programs).

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